

Southwark Sanctuary Framework

2024-2027

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Foreword by Cllr Jasmine Ali, Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Refugees

I am very proud to tell you about Southwark’s Borough of Sanctuary Framework.

As an ancient borough at the heart of London, and bordered by our great river, Southwark has a long and honourable history as a place of safety for those fleeing violence and persecution.

We have given a welcome and a home to migrant communities across the ages, from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East. Our culture, cuisine, community, and spirit have been enriched a thousand-fold by citizens and families from all over the world.

More than 40 per cent of our residents were born outside of the UK – over 121,000 people. So, we can say proudly and without exaggeration that we are one of the most diverse boroughs in the country.

And one of the most harmonious! The very first Black Mayor of Southwark, Sam King MBE, was a community activist and campaigner. He served in World War II and then returned to Britain on the Empire Windrush in 1948. He co-founded the Notting Hill carnival. Today he is recognised as one of the key social architects of postwar Britain.

This legacy can be seen in the names of public buildings, libraries, and health centres, and on plaques across the borough, paying tribute to the contributions of the bold pioneers that settled in Southwark.

On a personal note, I moved to Southwark 25 years ago and I am so happy that I made my home here. My father was a Muslim, my mother was a Christian and my partner is Jewish. I can personally attest that our multi-faith communities make everyone welcome.

On Southwark Council itself, 48 per cent of our councillors are from Black, Asian, and ethnic minority groups. Our Madam Mayor came to the UK as a refugee from Somalia and the MP for Peckham, at the heart of Southwark, arrived from Sierra Leone as a refugee at the age of five.

The Borough of Sanctuary journey

Southwark has the third highest number of refugees in London.

In 2018 a group of local voluntary sector groups and residents began working towards participating in the Sanctuary movement. In 2020 Southwark Council Assembly passed a motion committing Southwark to become a ‘Borough of Sanctuary’.

In that time, we have supported 2363 Asylum Seekers, receiving asylum support for 814 Refugees under Streamlined Asylum Processing (SAP). We supported a further 69 Refugees under various Refugee Resettlement Schemes (VPRS/ARCS/ARAP).

Our communities came through when needed with 1,668 Southwark residents registering with DLUHC volunteering to host Ukrainian guests and 341 residents have welcomed 556 guests under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.

We supported 223 Afghan nationals under Operation Pitting/Afghan Bridging Hotels, 1027 destitute migrants with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) Restrictions, and more than 20 refugees supported by Community Sponsorship Groups to resettle and integrate into life in Southwark.

We were the first local authority to commission a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, focusing on the health and wellbeing needs of asylum seekers, refugees and vulnerable migrants in the borough. This work has been recognised as exemplary and our approach is being replicated all around the country.

In Southwark we made a conscious decision to invest in our libraries and expand our services, ensuring community spaces are available to all our residents. We were delighted to be told our Libraires and Heritage service is the first in London to be awarded Library of Sanctuary award.

Thank you.

All along, our council has worked together with our voluntary sector partners and refugees to deliver the best possible services to people seeking sanctuary in Southwark.

Our framework and action plan has been shaped with all our partners and people with lived experience.

We all agree that the launch of Southwark's Borough of Sanctuary framework could not be timelier.

In these times of national and global tension, our commitment to providing a safe, welcoming, and inclusive environment for all has never been stronger. We have a strong tradition of opposing hatred in all its forms, from Islamophobia and antisemitism to all forms of xenophobia.



Today we have a new national Labour government. We will work with the Prime Minister and Home Secretary to reform the cruel 'hostile environment' policy created by the previous government. Together with the voluntary sector and our community organisations, we will reaffirm our commitment to equality, unity, and justice for all.

I extend my deepest gratitude to all our partners from the Southwark Day Centre for Asylum Seekers, the Southwark Refugee Communities Forum, Community Southwark, the Law Centre, Panjshir Aid, United St Saviours, Citizens Advice. I extend a special thanks to: Sally Causer, Madeleine Kelleher, Eltayeb Hassan, Pauline Nandoo, Haidi Sharifi, Sarah Thurman and Anood Al-Samerai. All our sisters and brothers who brought this work to life through their experience and valuable feedback.

Thanks too to our officers across the council including Stephen Douglass, Clara Fiti, Mekdes Alemayehu, Pamela Abdel-Baset, Anna Reid, Danielle Wallace their fantastic team and everyone else who contributed to making this vision a reality.

Cllr Jasmine Ali, Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Refugees

Foreword by Eltayeb

It has been an incredible experience to witness Southwark become a Borough of Sanctuary, and more so I am overjoyed to have been part of a development that renders London a safer, more welcoming refuge for asylum seekers and immigrants from all over the world.

Having immigrated from Sudan in 2000, I have spent the last 20 years of my life working and living in this borough. Being part of a refugee-led organisation such as the Southwark Refugee Communities Forum (SRCF) means connecting with refugees on a deeper level, based on language, culture, or religion. This has aided refugees in communicating their confusion, fear, and lack of support in various aspects.

I have always had a passion for supporting people who demonstrate resilience and determination in the face of adversity. I feel fortunate to share my personal experience and knowledge with those on similar journeys.

I often witness refugees achieving remarkable things as they strive to rebuild better lives for themselves and their families, showing courage to pursue their dreams and make a positive impact.

I believe that their journeys demonstrate how people seeking sanctuary can rebuild their lives based on hope, courage, love, and kindness instead of fear.

SRCF has been working in partnership with Southwark Council and voluntary and community organisations since 2003. I have seen this relationship develop and I share this joint vision between my organisation, participating voluntary sector colleagues and Southwark Council to make the borough a place that welcomes, supports, and celebrates asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants.

Eltayeb Hassan
Project Manager
SRCF



Our Vision

Our vision is to make Southwark a place that welcomes, supports and celebrates asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants.

We are committed to creating a culture of empathy, understanding and inclusion across the borough. We will take action to promote the rights and welfare of all people seeking sanctuary and protection by bringing communities together to address the issues that matter to them. We recognise the critical role of our grass roots voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations in realising this vision. We will work in strong collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders, VCS organisations and statutory partners to ensure there is a co-ordinated and proactive response to the needs and welfare of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants living in our borough. We are committed to amplifying the voices of people with lived experiences to ensure their voice influences change at local, regional and national levels.



Our Values

We are committed to following the City of Sanctuary (CoS) values:

- Inclusivity** We welcome and respect people from all backgrounds, place value on diversity and are committed to equality.
- Openness** We are committed to a culture of working collaboratively across the City of Sanctuary networks and in partnership with others.
- Participation** We work with people seeking sanctuary and value and recognise the contribution of all. We aspire to ensure that people seeking sanctuary are involved in all decision making at all levels and are supported to become leaders in the organisation, networks, and the wider movement.
- Inspiring** We work with enthusiasm and positivity and are determined to surpass what has already been achieved to welcome refugees and people seeking sanctuary.
- Integrity** We aspire to high standards of honesty and behaviour, and always to act in the interests of people seeking sanctuary.

These values sit alongside Southwark Council's values.

At its core, the essence of sanctuary values is to act in accordance with the Equality Act 2010, especially in the case of marginalisation experienced by refugees, asylum seekers and migrants by promoting and safeguarding the welfare of all our residents. Engagement with sanctuary seekers and partners who support them, shapes our strategic priorities.



Our Commitment

The main voluntary community sector (VCS) agencies supporting asylum seekers, refugees and migrants have for many years worked in partnership to support and provide improved access to mainstream services for this target group. In 2018 the partnership, working with local residents began to explore participating in the Sanctuary movement.

In January 2020, the Council Assembly passed a motion to declare Southwark to be a 'Borough of Sanctuary' and called on Cabinet to:

- Work with community groups to harness public support to help and support refugee, migrant and asylum seekers in Southwark.
- Continue to celebrate the contribution of refugee and migrant communities to Southwark.
- Continue to work with organisations in the borough who support refugees and asylum seekers in the borough.
- Challenge anti-refugee and anti-migrant attitudes wherever they are found.
- Lobby the government to reform No Recourse to Public Funds so that people are no longer blocked from fully participating in society for years while they wait for their status to be resolved.

This framework governs Southwark's commitment to becoming a Borough of Sanctuary and formalises Southwark's role in delivering on a borough of sanctuary. It forms part of the council's application for recognition as a Borough of Sanctuary by the City of Sanctuary Movement.

This framework sits alongside the priorities and outcomes of the 2022-2026 council's Delivery Plan affirming the council aim to 'welcome migrants and refugees to our borough and work with local communities to welcome and support people fleeing persecution, conflict, and disasters'.



**The Council aim to
'welcome migrants
and refugees to
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and disasters'**

Introduction

Southwark is located in the heart of London, one of the most globally diverse cities. People from across the United Kingdom (UK), mainland Europe and from around the world come to Southwark every year—seeking a place to live, work, study and make a home. Many people also come to Southwark each year seeking sanctuary, having fled conflict, persecution, or other inhumane treatment in their home countries.

Southwark has a long history of welcoming asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants from around the world, with growing numbers settling into Southwark in recent years. Over the last five years Southwark has seen a dramatic increase in the number of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants settling in the borough. Driven by various local, regional, national, and international factors there has been increased demand for the provision of holistic support services to help address the complex needs of our sanctuary seeking population.

The Borough of Sanctuary accreditation affirms Southwark's on-going commitment to supporting and empowering those with lived experiences of migration and displacement. The aim is for people seeking sanctuary to have a meaningful voice in the design and review of services provided to them, to achieve equal access to key areas such as healthcare, welfare services, housing, education, and employment.

Our approach is to empower, support and collaborate with statutory services, voluntary and community sector organisations and individuals to embed a welcoming environment and to foster solidarity between existing communities, businesses, migrants, and people seeking sanctuary.

Jointly shaped by the council, key voluntary and community sector partners and the voices of people seeking sanctuary, this framework sets out our ambition and commitment to build on and strengthen our work in the years ahead; welcoming all who arrive or settle in Southwark. Working collectively as a community of sanctuary, we will empower refugees, asylum seekers and migrants to reach their full potential and contribute to Southwark's community, culture and economy while thriving and living safely and securely.



Our Population

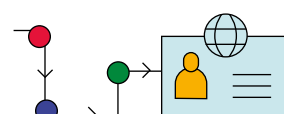
Results of the 2021 Census on 'Demography and Migration' showed that over 121,000 Southwark residents were born outside the UK, Channel Islands and Ireland, encompassing 40% of Southwark's total residents.

In addition, Southwark has experienced a drastic increase in the number of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants settling into the borough in recent years. The figures below paint a small picture of Southwark's sanctuary seeking population:



2,363

Asylum Seekers receiving asylum support



814

Refugees under Streamlined Asylum Processing (SAP)



69

Refugees under various Refugee Resettlement Schemes (VPRS/ARCS/ARAP)



556

Guests under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme



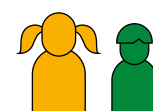
223

Afghan nationals under Operation Pitting/Afghan Bridging Hotels



1,027

Destitute migrants with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) Restrictions



246

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children and Care Leavers



1,000+

Refugees, asylum seekers and migrants supported by key VCS organisations in Southwark



The Challenge

Migration and displacement have long been a highly politicised issue with VCS organisations often left to pick up the pieces on the ground and provide essential assistance to people seeking sanctuary. The numerous challenges faced by people to rebuild their lives in Southwark, and the work to embed our commitment as a Borough of Sanctuary, takes place in a challenging environment, intensified by international, national, and localised pressures.

Housing Demand

Housing affordability, availability and suitability remain core challenges in most communities across the UK and are acutely felt within London. The cost-of-living crisis has further exacerbated poverty and homelessness. The criticisms Local Authorities frequently face in tackling the housing crisis is an on-going national and local debate.

Like other Local Authorities across the country, Southwark housing waiting lists are extensive, and the availability of affordable private sector accommodation is scarce. Many people in receipt of asylum support locally lose entitlement to their NASS financial assistance and/or accommodation within 28 days or less after being granted refugee status by the Home Office. The council and the VCS groups are working together; aiming to ensure that refugees are supported into mainstream accommodation. The current pressures related to the high cost of temporary accommodation and a lack of affordable private sector accommodation in and around Southwark places a significant challenge to securing accommodation.

Increasing Asylum Seeker Population

Historically, the Home Office's dispersal policy has meant that Southwark has had a relatively low number of asylum seekers in the borough. In March 2019 the Home Office's National Asylum Support Service (NASS) was only supporting 59 asylum seekers in Southwark. By March 2023, this figure had increased by 3905% to 2363 (a 40-fold increase). As a result of a rapid growth in the asylum application backlog, and a lack of suitable dispersal accommodation, the Home Office has been using hotels as temporary 'Contingency Hotels' to house asylum seekers who are receiving NASS support. This means that Southwark, which historically only had one Initial Accommodation Centre, Barry House, currently has an additional four contingency hotels.

The Home Office commissions Clearsprings Ready Homes (CRH) to provide asylum seeker accommodation in London and the Southeast of England. Local Authorities have no influence on the placement of asylum seeker accommodation in their boroughs, which are managed by government subcontractor networks. These sites are set up rapidly, with little opportunity for input or engagement from support services locally such as education and health. The hotel environment has exacerbated concerns relating to residents' mental health, safety, educational attainment, and practical needs. This has led to VCS organisations, the council and our Borough of Sanctuary partners stepping in to provide support and campaign for adequate standards to be met.

NRPF

No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) is an immigration condition usually imposed when a person has been issued leave to enter or remain for a temporary purpose, such as to visit, study or work. The NRPF condition excludes people from accessing most state benefits and services, including Universal Credit, Child Benefit, and social housing. In the case of people seeking sanctuary and those with insecure status, NRPF causes significant hardship among Londoners, affecting their health, education, housing, and access to universal services such as support for domestic abuse or when experiencing homelessness. The global pandemic exacerbated this, with many people subject to NRPF having almost no safety net of support during this time. The growing cost of living pressures will have particularly negative effects on households with NRPF, since they cannot rely on benefits or support packages when facing financial hardships.

The government introduced the NRPF policy to promote integration in society and encourage migrants to be financially independent so that they are not a burden on 'taxpayers'. However, significant evidence shows the policy is having the opposite effect, exacerbating social, economic, and racial inequalities. Only those eligible through local authority statutory duties due to safeguarding children, disability, mental health condition or illness can access any support. We commit to continually review our approach to ensure this group is better able to access support locally.

Funding

At a national level, there is limited government funding available for work in this area and current price increases are placing immense pressures on the operating budgets of the local authority and voluntary and community sector services. This also presents immense challenges to people seeking sanctuary whose everyday living costs are increasing daily against limited incomes.

Despite these challenges, the Southwark Borough of Sanctuary partnership group will continue to work collectively and collaboratively to maximise the support available to all residents seeking sanctuary in the years ahead.

Health

People seeking sanctuary experience a range of structural health inequalities comparatively to the general population. Access to health services is a major issue for these populations, because of language barriers, difficulty navigating the health, welfare and education systems and fear of immigration enforcement by statutory services.

Limited specialist and culturally sensitive services such as mental health support causes excessive wait times that can lead to crisis or breakdowns. Implications of the hostile environment in local settings including the current NHS charging system limits the accessibility of care for irregular migrants and embed a culture of hesitation for these groups to access formal healthcare. Further work needs to be done in Southwark, to meet the needs of asylum seekers, refugees, and irregular migrants by building on existing strengths, such as the trusted role of the voluntary and community sector organisations.

In 2023, the council commissioned a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) focusing on the health and well-being needs of asylum seekers and refugees in Southwark. The report outlines 39 recommendations across five themes on how Southwark Council, South East London, Integrated Care Board (ICB) and local partners can work together to better meet the needs of these populations.

Political Context

Over the past decade, the previous Conservative government implemented a suite of policies with the explicit aim of creating challenging circumstances for those seeking sanctuary in the UK to travel to and settle here. A narrative of attributing the many crises facing the UK to 'out of control immigration' has arisen leading to the spread of an anti-migrant attitude, most acutely displayed in the summer of 2024 with the outbreak of far-right rioting that targeted buildings associated with sanctuary-seekers.

These anti-migrant attitudes have led to continued external pressure on political parties from the media and voters to reduce net migration, resulting in the system of government we see today that remains focused on deterring migration and removing those with irregular status, as opposed to strengthening the process of integrating new migrants and refugees. The immigration control policies of the Home Office have also been embedded into public services, creating a lack of trust in those authorities striving to support sanctuary seekers. These political circumstances result in increased challenges for local authorities to sufficiently support sanctuary seekers into secure employment and housing, leaving them at risk of poor health, homelessness, and destitution.

Despite these challenges, Southwark Stands Together against all forms of discrimination. Southwark prides itself in welcoming those from around the world and is home to a diverse community, with people of many different backgrounds, cultures and faiths living side-by-side.

Legal Advice

Many people who should be able to access free, high quality immigration advice are unable to do so because of the lack of capacity within accredited organisations. Cuts to legal aid provision has created a crisis situation as many private practice solicitors have given up legal aid work and organisations have folded due to financial pressure. This has created extreme pressure on the not-for-profit legal providers, and they report having to turn cases away daily. Access to good quality advice is essential in tackling the root cause of homelessness and destitution. The council will review availability of legal advice services for sanctuary seekers.



Sanctuary in Southwark: Our Progress

We have learned through practice that it takes the collective efforts and commitment of the council, voluntary and community organisations, local grass roots refugee and migrant communities, statutory partners, funders, and regional and national networks to achieve our vision of sanctuary. Throughout the responses to the various crisis, it has been clear that the skill, experience, expertise and reach of voluntary community sector organisations are crucial to the success and sustainability of efforts taken to support sanctuary seekers.

We are very proud of the work undertaken across the borough by a range of different stakeholders, often working in collaboration, that has allowed us to lay a strong foundation as a Borough of Sanctuary.

Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA)

We are one of the only councils to commission a local university to undertake a thorough piece of research on the health, inclusion and overall well-being needs of asylum seekers and refugees (AS&R) living in Southwark. The council, in partnership with the South East London Integrated Care Board (ICB), commissioned the Migrant Health Research Unit at St George's University of London to deliver a health and wellbeing needs assessment for asylum seekers, refugees and those with irregular immigration status in Southwark.

The AS&R health & wellbeing needs assessment outlines the demographics of local asylum seeker and refugee populations, and highlights key health and wellbeing needs for these groups, including: mental health, food and nutrition, infectious disease and immunisation, safeguarding, education, employment and income, housing and access to legal advice. The needs assessment also highlights good practice, and ongoing barriers, for access to services for asylum seekers, refugees, and those with irregular migration status.

The JSNA outlines 39 recommendations across five themes detailing how Southwark Council, NHS and VCS partners can work together to meet the needs of asylum seekers and refugees. The Sanctuary Action plan will complement the recommendations in the JSNA.

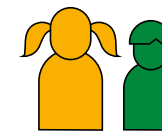
Children First

All refugee, asylum seeking, migrant heritage children and young people who live in Southwark are treated as children first and foremost. This commitment represents our collective effort to make Southwark an exemplar of practice in reducing the social and economic disadvantages associated with having refugee, asylum seeker or irregular migrant status.

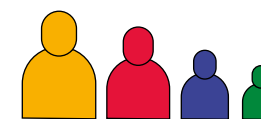
The Southwark Family Early Help Service (FEH) located within the MASH Team provides support for refugee, asylum seeker and migrant families ensuring that there is effective coordination of services aimed at providing comprehensive support encompassing legal advocacy, health and educational access, mental health services and a range of opportunities to promote social integration.

From April 2022-March 2024, Southwark Family Early Help Service (FEH) provided family assistance to 545 children and young people, totalling 234 families impacted by immigration issues. In addition, approximately 71 children (32 families) received help and support through the Homes for Ukraine and Afghanistan Resettlement Schemes.

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Southwark Council
is supporting
52
unaccompanied asylum-
seeking children and
194
former unaccompanied
asylum-seeking children



As of the end of 31 March 2024 Southwark Council was supporting 52 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and 194 former unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (now care leavers). This represents 13% and 29% of the total of children in care and the care leaver population in our borough.

Alongside the fulfilment of our statutory duties in relation to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and care leavers, we provide the following specialist support:

- Our virtual schoolwork's proactively to ensure children are in education as soon as possible and maintains strong links with colleges providing ESOL courses supporting children to learn English.
- Carelink is a specialist CAMHS service for looked after children in Southwark and has a dedicated post to support unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. In addition, there are embedded Clinical Practitioners in Social Work teams providing support and the Nest (a multi-agency youth mental health support project) offering drop-in therapeutic support for Care Leavers.

In September 2022, Southwark had an inspection of Children's Services and in the report published in November 2022, inspectors wrote:

"Care leavers who spoke to inspectors expressed their gratitude to Southwark Council, their social workers, and their personal advisers. They all talked about how well they had been supported across every aspect of their lives. Most importantly, they are guided through the legal processes of applying for leave to remain. They told inspectors that Southwark is a 'special council' and like family to them."

In December 2023, Southwark had a focused visit looking at Support to Care Leavers aged 18 to 25 and in the report published on 29 January 2024, inspectors wrote:

"Unaccompanied asylum-seeking care leavers are well supported. Their health, education and cultural needs are understood by their PAs, including the impact of trauma. The provision of effective advocacy and legal advice helps to ensure that these care leavers are able to navigate successfully through the relevant processes to progress their asylum claims."

**"Unaccompanied
asylum-seeking
care leavers are
well supported."**

Children's Services inspectors

Streamlining Asylum Processing (SAP) Response

Since February 2023, the council has been working in partnership with Southwark Law Centre (SLC), Southwark Refugee Communities Forum (SRCF), Southwark Day Centre for Asylum Seekers (SDCAS), Citizens Advice Southwark (CAS) and Panjshir Aid to coordinate and mobilise a response to the Home Office's new Streamlined Asylum Processing (SAP) approach for clearing the asylum backlog. As the SAP process evolved, the partnership has been able to mobilise a system of support to help asylum seekers receiving SAP positive decisions move on to mainstream services and receive support to integrate within the community.

Often asylum seekers have no real understanding of their rights and entitlements. The short timeframe that asylum seekers are given to move on from NASS accommodation and financial support (28 days or less), has resulted in an increased risk of homelessness and destitution.

Working together, we have been able to mobilise a comprehensive outreach programme to raise awareness of the introduction of the SAP amongst the qualifying six nationalities; provide legal advice to those without legal representation of their own; and run weekly advice surgeries organised by SRCF, housing officers and relevant VCS and statutory partners.

The council has established the Asylum and Refugee Resettlement Team in December 2023 to offer wraparound support to asylum seeker residents in contingency hotels who fall under the Streamlining Asylum Processing (SAP). The Team act as a first point of contact for Clearsprings/Hotel Managers to refer asylum seekers who are receiving a decision. Resettlement Workers carry out a needs assessment and provide practical support to aid long-term integration.

Resettlement Schemes

VPRS

Working in partnership with key VCS organisations Southwark Council has been able to participate in the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS). The council has been directly supporting four families (22 individuals) since 2018 providing one to one support to families through a dedicated Resettlement Worker.

Our council also works with four Southwark based Community Sponsorship groups welcoming and supporting refugees under the Vulnerable Person's Resettlement Scheme (VPRS). The committed members of Bermondsey Welcomes Refugees, Herne Hill Refugees, Peckham Sponsors Refugees and Telegraph Hill Welcomes Refugees, working with Reset UK and Citizens UK, have successfully supported over 20 refugees resettle and integrate to life in Southwark.

Afghan Bridging Hotels

Southwark Council, working with key partners including Panjshir Aid (a Southwark based Afghan community organisation), SRCF, SDCAS, Community Southwark, DWP, NHS and public health colleagues, was able to mobilise a swift response to provide support to 223 individuals who had been rescued from Afghanistan as part of Operation Pitting in 2021. Alongside work to ensure that people's practical needs were met, residents of the bridging hotels were able to access advice, support, and advocacy services from a range of providers as well as a dedicated Council Resettlement Officer stationed at each of the Bridging Hotels.

ARAP/ACRS

The current pressures related to scarcity of social housing and the lack of affordable private sector accommodation in and around Southwark places a significant challenge to securing accommodation for families seeking to resettle under the Afghan Relocations and Resettlement Policy (ARAP) and the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS).

So far Southwark Council has been able to offer 1 family with accommodation under the ARAP/ACRS Schemes and accepted nine families (39 individuals) individuals and families who are able to resettle in Southwark via the Government's MEARS and Find Your Own Pathway (FYOP) schemes. We currently provide integration support with a dedicated Council Resettlement Worker providing one to one support to individuals and families to help them resettle in our borough. We have placed no cap on the total number of households that we can provide wrap around integration support to and hope to see this population grow.

Southwark Council is also working with a local Community Sponsorship group – Herne Hill Refugees - as part of the DLUHC led 'Communities for Afghans' pilot project.

Homes for Ukraine Scheme

Since March 2022, Southwark residents have shown immense generosity and welcome to individuals and families that have been displaced from their homes because of the Russian war on Ukraine. A total of 1, 668 Southwark residents registered with the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) volunteering to host Ukrainian guests under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. Of those, 341 hosts have welcomed 556 Ukrainians into their homes.

Working with key partners and several internal departments the council has been able to mobilise a response to swiftly meet the requirements placed on Local Authorities and to provide ongoing resettlement support with allocated Resettlement Workers to guests and hosts. The scope of the scheme has led to the establishment of a dedicated Homes for Ukraine team within the council who continue to support new arrivals under the scheme as well as provide packages of support to enable guests to find sustainable accommodation and rebuild their lives in the UK.



Destitution and No Recourse to Public Funds

In 2015, the council established a single service for people with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPf). It falls on local authorities to assess the social care needs of single adults under the Care Act 2014 and/or the social care needs of children under section 17 of the Children Act 1989. The council also supports people with NRPf who have been sectioned under the Mental Health Act 1983.

This specialist service works with vulnerable individuals and families to ensure that they receive appropriate support to meet their needs while also supporting them to find pathways to independence including through the provision of access to free legal advice and representation to resolve their immigration status.

Health

Public health and NHS partners have a long history of working to support the health and inclusion needs of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in the borough.

A dedicated Health Inclusion Team (HIT) works with residents of the various Asylum Contingency Hotels and Barry House to ensure that their health needs are effectively identified and met. Vaccine catch up clinics are run in IAC/Contingency Hotels supported by the Health Inclusion Team, ICB and public health. A health promotion van also regularly attends key celebration events to reach the Southwark refugee, asylum seeker and migrant communities.

The team also run the Southwark holiday food and fun programme, which focuses on healthy eating incentives and supports families living in the Asylum Contingency Hotels in the borough as well as organising community feasts.

The public health team continue to run a wide range of awareness raising events and activities to engage and inform various stakeholders. Recent examples include funding a translated cancer awareness talks delivered by Cancer Research UK at Southwark Refugee Communities Forum in Arabic and Tigrinya and producing two mental health signposting resources outlining mental health support

available for the general public as well as specific services for AS&R. The team are also currently delivering a training offer to council teams as well as statutory and voluntary and community organisations working with asylum seekers and refugees (AS&R) groups on Mental Health First Aid and Suicide Training.

The team, along with community health ambassadors, carried out an audit to assess adherence of Southwark's primary care surgeries to Doctors of the World's "Safe Surgeries" policies. Follow up work is underway to support GP surgeries to work on the identified recommendations.

The Southwark Asylum Seeker and Refugee Health and Wellbeing Group meets monthly, bringing together key health and public health stakeholders and monitoring the progress of the JSNA recommendations.

Education

The FEH service and the Education team have been working together to ensure a smooth and effective admissions process for refugee, asylum seeker and migrant children. The council has a dedicated lead officer working on Education Access.

There are several different types of English classes running in Southwark, from beginner to advanced levels. These include face-to-face or online classes, which are provided in a number of different organisations in the borough including at Southwark Day Centre for Asylum Seekers (SDCAS).

We plan to increase our provision of ESOL classes for our asylum seeker and refugee residents. We recognise the importance of understanding English in enabling our sanctuary seeking population to make friends, find future employment, find better employment opportunities, assist with children's homework, build confidence in interacting with other professionals such as doctors and teachers, and prepare for higher education.

In April 2024, the council presented a Borough of Sanctuary information session to primary school Head teachers encouraging schools to join our network and become an awarded school of sanctuary. We aim to encourage all schools in Southwark to sign the pledge to become awarded schools of sanctuary.



Libraries

Southwark Libraries were awarded Libraries of Sanctuary status in May 2024; the first Libraries of Sanctuary in London. Southwark libraries have a proud history of welcoming asylum seeker, refugee, and migrant communities.

Library services have historically undertaken outreach work to promote their services in Barry House, one of the Home Office's Initial Accommodation Centres (IAC) as well as engaging residents at local VCS organisations. The service previously visited a Somali refugee day centre monthly and won a Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals award called 'Welcome to your library'.

Weekly Baby and Toddler sessions are provided at Dulwich Library, offering, a games club and a homework help club for school age children. Southwark Libraries have also bought books in Spanish, Arabic, Pashtu, Farsi, Albanian and hold children's picture books in dual languages.

Libraries offer free membership to asylum seeker and refugee residents, and they can access free services, including books for adults and children, free computer use, free Wi-Fi, IT taster sessions and digital drop-in sessions. In addition, access to eBooks and eAudio, magazines and newspapers, press reader (online magazines and newspapers from around the world), Go Citizen Support (practice for British citizenship test) are available, including events and activities for adults, children, and warm hubs.

Libraries run an annual 'Festival of Words', which is now in its sixth year. The seven-to-ten-day long programme of events has run concurrently with Refugee week for the last two years. Authors, filmmakers, and activists with lived in experience of displacement and migration attend and co-host these events.

Libraries work alongside City of Sanctuary (CoS) to host a pan London networking event for authorities who are in the application process or intending to apply for Libraries of Sanctuary award to offer an opportunity to share good practice and ideas.

Voluntary & Community Sector

Southwark has a vibrant voluntary, community sector dedicated to supporting refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants and a range of projects and initiatives are already underway across Southwark to support people seeking sanctuary.

VCS partners provide invaluable services to sanctuary seekers on a wide range of topics such as immigration, housing, employment, education, health, and integration. Our key partners in the development and delivery of our Borough of Sanctuary vision and priorities include:

Southwark Law Centre (SLC): SLC was founded in 1976 and provides high quality, specialist legal advice and representation in the areas of asylum/immigration discrimination, education, employment, housing, public law, welfare rights, planning, and Windrush compensation claims for those who cannot afford to pay for this.

Southwark Refugee and Communities Forum (SRCF): SRCF is a refugee-led organisation established by residents with lived experience in Southwark. SRCF enables the voices of refugees to be heard and to develop mutual support between newly arrived asylum seekers and refugees and established communities.

Southwark Day Centre for Asylum Seekers (SDCAS): SDCAS aims to promote the well-being of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants and provide safe spaces for service users to access free, holistic services. This includes providing free lunches, advice and support around health, housing, immigration, education, and employment including co-ordinating a range of social and well-being activities.

Citizens Advice Southwark (CAS): Established in 1939 when CAS first opened, CAS generalist volunteers provide asylum seekers, refugees and migrants advice and information on immigration issues. CAS also have a specialist immigration caseworker who assists service users who have more complex immigration issues.

Panjshir Aid: Panjshir Aid is a non-profit organisation based in Southwark, which works to support the welfare and integration of refugees and asylum seekers, particularly those from Afghanistan. Afghans settled in Britain run Panjshir Aid.

Community Southwark: The umbrella body for the voluntary and community sector in Southwark. Community Southwark support charities and community groups with advice, training, and volunteers. They work to connect organisations to each other, funders, and decision makers to make change, together.

The council aims to work closely with our local partners throughout the lifespan of this framework and aim to continue building a sustainable network beyond 2027.



Taking Action

Bringing together the expertise, knowledge, and experience of wide range of stakeholders, we have been able to identify four key priority areas to focus on in order to achieve our vision of Southwark as a Borough of Sanctuary.

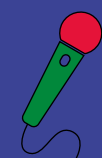
The insight and recommendations gained from Joint Needs Assessment (JSNA) have provided a strong evidence base to enable the development of a well informed and needs led Borough of Sanctuary Framework and action plan.

The council will focus on the following four high-level objectives, which will be delivered via the council's Sanctuary Action Plan:



Objective 1: Stand Together

We want Southwark to be a place of safety, support, and opportunity for those seeking sanctuary - embedding a collective message of welcome and kindness, and challenge to the wider hostile environment.



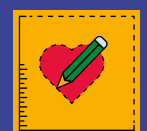
Objective 2: Voice

We want to celebrate the culture, diversity, and contributions of those seeking sanctuary and amplify their voices and experiences to shape positive change.



Objective 3: Shaping Services

We want to better understand the experiences and needs of those seeking sanctuary and ensure that services and local agencies are responding to these issues and enabling opportunities.



Objective 4: Bespoke Support

We want to foster collaboration between different local agencies so they can respond effectively, cooperatively, and flexibly to the ongoing and changing needs of sanctuary-seekers.



Southwark Sanctuary Framework 2024-2027 | 25

Monitoring Progress

The four high-level objectives on the left page will form the basis of a live action plan to be updated regularly as new challenges and opportunities are identified relating to changes in the local, regional and the national landscape. This approach supports flexibility to respond to emerging issues over time while working on core concerns that are likely to be more permanent.

Stakeholders, statutory services, and voluntary and community sector organisations will report into and measure the progress against our key priorities and actions undertaken through Southwark's Multi-Agency Forum (MAF).

The MAF meets quarterly and is chaired by Cllr Jasmine Ali the Deputy Leader and Lead Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Refugees and the council's Director of Stronger Neighbourhoods. All stakeholders will provide six monthly written updates on their progress for review at the Multi Agency Meetings (MAF).

A newly established Experts by Experience group will also be members of the MAF and able to participate in the monitoring and review of this action plan and framework.

Internally an annual progress report will be submitted to the Corporate Management Team (CMT) and political cabinet.

An accessible version of the Southwark Sanctuary Framework and Sanctuary Action Plan and annual progress reports will be publicly available, with presentations at local events aimed at wider engagement.

Southwark Sanctuary Action Plan 2024-2027



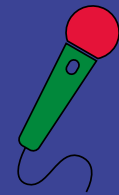
Objective 1: Stand Together

We will make Southwark a place of safety, support, and opportunity for those seeking sanctuary - embedding a collective message of welcome and kindness, and challenge to the wider hostile environment

How we will work to meet the objective	Lead service(s)	Timescales
<p>We will set up a Multi-Agency Forum (MAF), which will be a partnership of statutory and VCS organisations, including council departments and health providers. Senior officers from within the council and from other statutory agencies e.g., Health and DWP will be invited to MAF meetings to share information and create a network of buy-in and inclusion to sanctuary values.</p> <p>Ensure clear and consistent structure and purpose of partnership forums and any related working groups/subgroups.</p> <p>People with Lived Experience to be represented on the MAF</p>	<p>Cabinet Member for Childrens, Education and Refugees to chair MAF.</p> <p>Secretariat: Senior Cabinet Advisor.</p>	<p>By August 2024</p> <p>By October/ November 2024</p>
<p>The Sanctuary Operational Meetings was established to enhance focus on the delivery of operational work. The Sanctuary Operational meetings will enable the council and VCS organisations to monitor emerging trends, evaluate performance, and plan future or emergency service delivery.</p> <p>The Sanctuary Operational meetings will review and monitor risk in relation to crisis/ project mobilisation working groups set up to manage immediate community risk issues, for example the council's response to the far-right disorder, Rwanda response, and e-visa.</p>	<p>Director of Stronger Neighbourhoods to chair Sanctuary Operational meetings.</p> <p>Secretariat, Divisional Business Manager for Director of Stronger Neighbourhoods.</p>	<p>By August 2024</p>

How we will work to meet the objective	Lead service(s)	Timescales
<p>We will set up subgroups working on specific issues such as health, influencing change, events, asylum response, and experts by experience group, education, and provision of legal advice.</p> <p>Ensure well-resourced partnership forums meet regularly, have set agendas, minutes, and action points clearly identified with timely follow through</p>	<p>Management Team, Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.</p> <p>Secretariat; NRPF Business Support Officer</p>	<p>By end of 2024</p>
<p>We will run engagement sessions with various council departments and other local institutions to spread the message of Sanctuary and share good practice guidance on creating a culture of welcome and inclusion.</p>	<p>Management Team; Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.</p>	<p>Set up by November 2024 and run on an ongoing basis.</p>
<p>We will support individual council services, schools, colleges, VCS organisations and employers to become places of sanctuary.</p>	<p>Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.</p>	<p>Annual target of four organisations per year to gain recognition as a place of sanctuary and/or sign a sanctuary pledge</p>
<p>MAF meetings will include an information exchange on Government policy and discuss any joint initiatives or responses to consultations and research. We will challenge central government policy that creates a hostile environment for migrants and sanctuary seekers.</p>	<p>Policy & Public Affairs Officer</p> <p>Strategy & Impact Strategy & Communities</p>	<p>On-going reviewed 6 monthly by MAF and influencing change sub-group.</p>
<p>We will contribute to the development of City of Sanctuary movement. Continue to be part of CoS LA steering group, ensure regular attendance of TNMs, contribute to discussions, participate in events, and work with other local authorities on specific issues.</p> <p>Work with MAF to develop a strategic approach to awareness raising initiatives and events</p>	<p>Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.</p> <p>Strategy & Impact Strategy & Communities</p>	<p>On-going reviewed quarterly by MAF and events sub-group</p>

How we will work to meet the objective	Lead service(s)	Timescales
<p>Ensure a broader set of officers and councillors are involved in awareness raising events and initiatives.</p> <p>Where events are VCS led, utilise council's communications team and resources to support those</p>	Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.	On-going reviewed quarterly by MAF and events sub-group
We will build a relationship with the local press to increase the number of positive sanctuary seeking stories published in the borough	Policy & Public Affairs Officer Strategy & Impact Strategy & Communities	First meeting with representative of Southwark News by November 2024, ongoing thereafter to be reviewed 6 monthly by Cabinet Member & MAF



Objective 2: Voice

We will celebrate the culture, diversity, and contributions of those seeking sanctuary and amplify their voices and experiences to shape positive change

How we will work to meet the objective	Lead service(s)	Timescales
We will develop a Southwark Experts by Experience Group in collaboration between the Council and VCS partners to offer sanctuary seekers a voice.	Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.	Group set up by October/November 2024
We will ensure that diverse voices and lived experiences are included in decision making and service planning related to specialist services for this group.	Southwark Refugee Communities Forum (SRCF)	The Experts by Experience Group to provide 6 monthly feedback at MAF meetings in monitoring the framework and action plan
We will embed a wider role for people seeking sanctuary in decision-making and insight gathering at all levels of council activity such as resident focus groups.		Ongoing (determined by reviews of existing services or the development on new projects and initiatives)
We will ensure that people with lived experience can feed into influencing change seeking to influence policy change on a local regional and national level.		

How we will work to meet the objective	Lead service(s)	Timescales
We will ensure a consistent presence for Borough of Sanctuary projects through communication channels, sharing the stories, successes, and challenges of residents with lived experience.	Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.	Ongoing reviewed at MAF and by Lived Experience Group
We will build on cohesion and support at a community level to challenge negative narratives through active myth busting.	Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure. Strategy & Impact Strategy & Communities Key VCS partner/ organisations.	Ongoing reviewed at MAF and by Lived Experience Group
We will include a regular agenda item on national policy updates so that as a partnership we can agree on responses.	Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure. Strategy & Impact Strategy & Communities	Ongoing reviewed at MAF and by Lived Experience Group
We will develop ongoing engagement with local residents to keep them informed about Borough of Sanctuary initiatives.	Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.	Website updated by December 2024-January 2025
This to include website updates and annual events e.g., Refugee week celebrations, Thank You events, community feasts, workshops, and other community engagement events.	VCS partners/ organisations.	Refugee week events in June 2024 and subsequent years Two Community feasts per year
We will raise our influencing profile with government by using our influential voice as a Borough of Sanctuary to demonstrate our innovative work in political spaces, establishing ourselves as a reliable source of expertise for policy change and implementation in the asylum area.	Policy & Public Affairs Officer Strategy & Impact Strategy & Communities	Ongoing to be reviewed 6 monthly by Cabinet Member & MAF

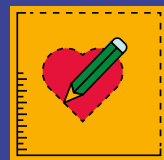


Objective 3: Shaping Services

We will ensure that council services and local agencies adapt and develop services that are shaped by the needs and experiences of sanctuary seekers and provides opportunities for their positive development.

How we will work to meet the objective	Lead service(s)	Timescales
We will ensure all relevant council strategies are aligned with sanctuary principles and include consideration of sanctuary seekers.	Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.	On-going reviewed 6 monthly by MAF
We will ensure the use of inclusive language in council communications. This will include developing translated early intervention resources.	Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.	By January/February 2025
Southwark's Sanctuary website needs to be updated to detail various support available in the community. Translatable pages will be included. Ensure the NRPF webpage is clearer and more accessible.	Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.	By December 2024-January 2025
Ensure a broad set of council services contribute to the Sanctuary Action Plan, and actions end up in workplans for council officers. Ensure services from leisure, housing, community safety and emergency services and adult safeguarding are involved in the Sanctuary Action Plan.	Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.	On-going reviewed 6 monthly by MAF
We will establish consultation and co-production groups with sanctuary seekers, on specifically identified projects to decide on projects that are meaningful to them with relevant teams within the council including other partners.	Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.	The Experts by Experience Group set up by October/ November 2024 1st co-design/ co-production pilot to be set up by March/April 2025

How we will work to meet the objective	Lead service(s)	Timescales
We will review availability of legal advice services for sanctuary seekers and other groups. Exploring opportunities to support expansion of provision as well as pathways to access and to provide residents with information about their rights.	Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.	By April 2025
We will embed sharing of information in MAF to provide greater insight into the needs of the Asylum Seeker, Refugee, and migrant population on Southwark.	Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.	On-going reviewed 6 monthly by MAF
We will run regular operational meetings with VCS partners, the Deputy Cabinet Leader, and senior officers to work collaboratively in addressing operational issues.	Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.	Operational group currently in place On-going progress reviewed 6 monthly by MAF
In May 2024, Southwark Libraries were awarded Libraries of Sanctuary status, the first libraries of sanctuary in London.	Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.	On-going progress reviewed at MAF
We will work with library services to raise awareness of issues faced by sanctuary seekers, offering support and participation opportunities, and contributing to a culture of welcome in the wider community.	Libraries and Heritage Services	
Housing and destitution to be strengthened. We will run refugee housing working group with refugee organisations and homeless charities. Housing officers to benefit from cultural and unconscious bias training.	Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure. Housing Solutions Resident Services	On-going progress reviewed 6 monthly by MAF
We will build relationships with new political representatives who have influence on government to place pressure on decision-makers to secure the national policy change needed to better shape our services	Policy & Public Affairs Officer Strategy & Impact Strategy & Communities	On-going to be reviewed 6 monthly by Cabinet Member & MAF



Objective 4: Bespoke Support

We will foster collaboration and coordination between different local agencies to enable the provision of effective specialist community-based support with the flexibility to meet the changing needs of asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants in Southwark

How we will work to meet the objective	Lead service(s)	Timescales
We will allocate a dedicated council officer to coordinate the work of the Borough of Sanctuary.	Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.	By October/ November 2024
We will work in collaboration with voluntary and statutory sector partners to provide coordinated holistic support for asylum seeker, refugee, and migrant families within the borough.	Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.	Coordination mechanism to be set up by December 2024 On-going to be monitored in MAF and various sub-groups
We will set up a new Southwark 4-year grants programme for VCS organisations working with refugees, asylum seekers and disadvantaged migrants with a total budget of £100k per year.	Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.	By January 2025
We will maintain the outreach service to provide support for asylum seekers in initial accommodation.	Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.	On-going to be reviewed and monitored at MAF and fortnightly SAP sub-group
We will work with partners to provide digital support to access vital information such as BRPs.	Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure alongside key VCS organisations.	By December 2024
We will work with partners in education and the VCS to increase the local provision of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses	Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.	By July 2024

How we will work to meet the objective	Lead service(s)	Timescales
Key officers to attend drop ins and to undertake outreach activities with key partners, to learn about the issues and people seeking sanctuary and how to better support them. This will be part of induction training of new relevant officers which will include shadowing key organisations to understand how they operate. We will acknowledge the expertise of VCS organisations and consider 'lunch and learn' sessions and peer to peer training, e.g., immigration law training by SLC, refugee and asylum seeker awareness training by SRCF and SDCAS	Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.	On-going
Training will be provided for all front-line council officers in understanding the needs and rights and entitlements of asylum seekers, refugees, and vulnerable migrants. On-line training for key staff, especially front-line officers is available. Enable local refugee organisations to co-create the online learning module and compensate for time dedicated to this.	Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.	On-going
We will review Modern Day Slavery and Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) pathways for sanctuary seekers.	Southwark Violence Against Women & Girls Project Officer Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.	By March/April 2025
We will assess the progress of the recommendations documented in the JSNA alongside Public Health, NHS, VCS, and the Council.	Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.	On-going to be reviewed and monitored at MAF and monthly health sub-group
Public Health will commission a health outreach service to target health inclusion groups including vulnerable migrants.	Public Health Children and Adults Services	On-going to be reviewed and monitored at MAF and discussed at monthly health sub-group
We will expand engagement with our allies with influence in the asylum policy area and contribute to their existing campaigns to secure meaningful policy change at a national level.	Policy & Public Affairs Officer Strategy & Impact Strategy & Communities	Ongoing to be reviewed every six months with Cabinet Member & MAF

Case Studies

Samira's story:

This case study follows the experience of Samira, a single, 45-year-old Eritrean woman who was faced with homelessness as a newly granted refugee from the Brit Hotel in Southwark. Samira had been living in the hotel for roughly a year and two months waiting for her asylum decision when she received her eviction letter. As a native Arabic and Tigrinya speaker, she did not initially know what the letter meant as it arrived in English. It was only when the hotel receptionist explained to Samira what the letter meant that she understood. Samira told us that she felt instant fear as she had no information on what would happen to her once her stay at the hotel came to an end.

Samira attended the housing surgery hosted by Southwark Refugee Communities Forum. She was made aware of the housing surgery by the receptionist at her hotel after she had received her eviction letter. The housing surgery provided Samira with the opportunity to meet face-to-face with the Southwark Council Housing Solutions team and with Kineara, an organisation that helps people to access privately rented accommodation. The surgery also provided interpreters for Samira in both Arabic and Tigrinya.

As Samira was not deemed a 'priority need' by the council, finding housing in the private rented sector remained her only realistic option. With the help of Kineara, Samira arranged a viewing for a room in a privately rented property. Samira is now housed in a 3-bedroom shared house in Brixton with two other Eritrean women. Samira told us that she does not know what she would have done if she had not had access to the housing surgery. She has described her experience of the surgery as positive and that the staff made her feel safe. We were also able to provide Samira with bedding and other household essentials to help her settle into her new home.

Southwark Refugee Communities Forum sat down with Samira once she had been housed to give her the opportunity to share her experience of the surgery and the impact it had on her housing situation. The interview was conducted with the help of the Forum's Arabic interpreter.

Khadijeh Story:

Khadijeh is a 34-year-old Iranian woman, who had been living in the Best Western Hotel in Peckham for two years with her husband and their two children aged 9 and 17 when they received their eviction letter. Khadijeh's eviction date, gave the family five days to leave. Khadijeh described the moment she received the notice as disorienting and very stressful. She recalls that the stress from the situation impacted her eating and that she fell sick.

Khadijeh had already visited the housing surgery prior to receiving her eviction letter to register with the council. She had discovered Southwark Refugee Communities Forum when on a walk with her friends from the hotel, shortly after they had been moved there. Khadijeh was aware that she needed to update her case worker with a copy of her eviction letter once she received it. As it was Friday evening when Khadijeh received her letter she was unable to get in touch with anyone from the council and knew that she would have to wait until Monday.

Khadijeh made a call to the council and informed them of her eviction letter. The council assured her that they would provide her family with temporary accommodation. On the day of her eviction, Khadijeh had not received an update from the council regarding her family's move. Anxious about their next steps, Khadijeh decided to attend the housing surgery where she knew that she could contact the council. While at the housing surgery, it was arranged for Khadijeh and her family to be housed in a 3-bedroom house in Lambeth.

Khadijeh expressed immense gratitude to the Forum for hosting the housing surgery and said that the most helpful part of the surgery was providing a space where clients could access help face-to-face help. She said that she felt that all staff members wanted to help her and that she had recommended the surgery to all her friends in a similar position.

Having been accommodated, Khadijeh is able to continue her studies and take her GCSE maths exam this summer. Khadijeh, who was a high school teacher in Iran, hopes to use her skills to become a primary school teaching assistant.

Tabarak's Story:

Tabarak is a 49-year-old Syrian woman who had been living in the Best Western Asylum hotel in Peckham with her 15-year-old son for two years and three months when she received their eviction notice. Thanks to conversations amongst residents at the hotel, in addition to flyers distributed in the hotel, Tabarak was aware of the Housing Surgery organised by Southwark Refugee Communities Forum (SRCF) in collaboration with Southwark Council, and that she could seek help for herself and her son to find housing. Their notice period was only 15 days, which Tabarak described as having left her very nervous. Tabarak was nervous about being moved somewhere unfamiliar, and that her and her son would have to start anew, a feeling all too familiar to her.

Tabarak attended the Housing Surgery and made a Homelessness Application with Southwark Council and the help of one of the Forum's Arabic interpreters. Tabarak expressed that it would have been very difficult for her without the Surgery as she does not speak fluent English. Tabarak described the Surgery as some sort of miracle for the residents of her hotel. Tabarak feared that the surgery would close before she received her eviction notice as she was only aware that it was a temporary service. The surgery and SRCF became a sanctuary to her, and a place that she felt comfortable in amongst all the change in her life.

Client P's Story:

“Eventually they introduced the centre to me. I came in that day with no hope. I was helped, supported by Southwark Day Care for Asylum Seekers (SDCAS). Through my journey, everything that I passed through, I have my papers. I lost my confidence throughout the journey, but I gained my confidence, and I was sharing my story with everyone, especially women, because we think back home that only men can be our whatever. So, it is only what they do or what they say that we can follow. But the power that we have when we have that confidence, we believe in what we can do. It's even more than what they can do for us. It actually helped me, it empowered me”.

Client A's Story: :

A 35-year-old Nigerian national presented at Southwark NRPF service in 2020 with her 3-year-old and 3-month-old children, requesting support as she was facing destitution and homelessness.

Client A came to the UK on a student visa in 2009; however, the academic institution went into liquidation and in the process Client A lost her student visa eligibility. Client A then began to seek support from her friends, working various jobs to support herself.

Client A was residing at different addresses as she did not have a fixed abode and finally exhausted all her support options. The father of her children was not able to support the children as he was also an overstayer. Although both of Client A's children were born in the UK but are Nigerian nationals due to their parents' nationality.

Client A was then referred to the NRPF service by an outside organisation in 2020, requesting support with accommodation and financial support under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989. Client A had an assessment with the NRPF service and was deemed destitute. The NRPF team provided support with accommodation and monthly subsistence.

Client A applied for a fee waiver to the Home Office as she was not able to manage her Home Office or legal fees to regularise her stay in the UK. The NRPF team provided her a letter confirming the local authority was supporting her.

The NRPF team supported the family until Client A's immigration matter was resolved. In 2024, Client A was granted leave to remain with recourse to public funds; her caseworker advised Client A to apply for mainstream benefits and had referred Client A to Southwark social housing. Client A was extremely happy with the support she was provided by her caseworker and the NRPF Team overall.

Client M's Story:

Along with his wife and three children, Client M arrived in the UK from Nigeria on a Student visa. Client M's visa duration was for one year, but it was extended for another three years.

Client M studied Business Management for one year, before beginning his Postgraduate studies. Client M was awarded a Master's in Business Administration.

Client M was employed as a Bed Manager in a local hospital and was sponsored by the Trust under the Tier 2 work visa. Client M was given five years to work with the same employer. However, there were errors made by the HR department. The certificate of sponsorship to obtain his work permit which the HR hospital gave him was the wrong code, meaning the code did not match his job description. This then affected Client M's immigration status, resulting in Client M without legal stay in the country. Client M tried several solicitors, but no one was able to assist.

Client M's family were residing in a bedsit accommodation in Southwark. Client M and his family were eventually evicted from this property, as the landlord was not permitted to sublet the property.

Client M approached the NRPF upon eviction and him and his family were placed in temporary accommodation by the council. Client M was referred to an immigration solicitor by NRPF team. Following the immigration legal referral Client M finally received his leave to remain in the UK with recourse to public funds.

Client M is now employed by a local hospital and his wife works as a software engineer for Tech Company. Client M and his family expressed their immense gratitude to Southwark Council for assisting them in a time of need.

Key Definitions

- **Sanctuary seekers:** A broad term used through this document to refer to refugees, asylum seekers and migrants with varied immigration statuses.
- **Asylum seeker:** A person who has applied for protection from a state under the 1951 United Nations Convention on the Status of Refugees on the grounds that if they returned to their country of origin, they are at risk of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political affiliations, or membership to a particular social group. They remain an asylum seeker whilst their application (or appeal against refusal of their application) is pending. If an application is successful for asylum, they are legally recognised as a 'Refugee'.
- **Refugee:** A person who has fled their own country because they are at risk of serious human rights violations and persecution. Refugees have a right to international protections and are defined and protected under the 1951 Refugee Convention on the Status of Refugees. This can be obtained by successful application for asylum to a country which is a signatory to the 1951 Convention or the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). In the UK refugee status currently grants a person five years leave to remain, and refugees gain the right to work, claim benefits, access mainstream education and housing.
- **Migrant:** There is no international legal definition of a migrant, but the terms refer to a person who leaves their country of birth or residence to settle (migrate) to another country. Some migrants leave their country because they want to work, study, or join their family. Others feel they must leave their country because of poverty, political unrest, natural disasters, or other serious circumstances that exist there.
- **Initial accommodation centre (IAC):** Short-term housing, usually in a hostel-type environment, that can be full-board, half-board, or self-catering, for asylum seekers who need accommodation urgently.
- **Contingency IAC/ Hotel:** Initial accommodation opened since 2019 under the new Asylum Accommodation and Support Services Contracts (AASC), usually in re-purposed hotels, barracks or hostels.
- **Bridging accommodation:** Includes all accommodation procured by the Home Office for the purpose of providing temporary accommodation for those brought over to the UK as a result of events in Afghanistan/Operation Pitting following the fall of Kabul in August 2021
- **UASC:** Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are children and young people who are seeking asylum in the UK but who have been separated from their parents or carers.
- **Section 95:** Financial and/or accommodation support provided by the Home Office's National Asylum Support Service (NASS) for asylum seekers who are destitute while they wait for a decision on their asylum claim.
- **Section 98:** Provision of emergency accommodation and assistance for destitute asylum seekers who have submitted an application for NASS section 95 support,
- **Section 4:** NASS Support provided to a small number of asylum seekers who exhaust their right to appeal, but are destitute and unable to leave the country despite taking all reasonable steps to do so.
- **Dispersal accommodation:** Primarily self-catering accommodation, provided under Section 95 of the 1999 Immigration Act, designed for long-term stays until a decision is made on an asylum case.
- **Family Early help (FEH):** A Southwark Council department responsible for supporting families and young people with needs beyond the level that universal services can address.
- **Integrated Care Board (ICB):** South East London ICB, brings together partners involved in planning and providing NHS services.
- **Health Inclusion Team (HIT):** A medical team under the Guy's and St Thomas NHS Foundation Trust focused on inclusion health.
- **No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF):** The state of being unable to claim benefits that are classed as 'public funds' in the UK due to a person's immigration status.

